Textile spaces, interior and exterior

Weddigen, Tristan

Chapter 8

TEXTILE SPACES, INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

TRISTAN WEDDIGEN

In late-medieval and early modern European visual and material culture, textiles counted among the most important and valuable means of ornament and display.[1] Apart from the obvious case of clothing, wall hangings, too, were valued as precious: they functioned as mobile "soft furniture," acting as architectural attire for public bodies and as backgrounds for their performances. No worthy palace would present its interior naked, as it were, to respectable visitors. Both within and outside churches, sacred spaces and times would be distinguished from common life and dressed up for special occasions. Fabrics were so common and expected in architectural decor that medieval and early modern books of ceremonies, treatises for *maestri di casa,* and the general *Kunstliteratur* remain conspicuously silent about their uses and meanings, although countless wall hangings and tapestries are mentioned in palace inventories, ambassadorial dispatches, encomiastic writings, and *avvisi.* But these mostly quantitative sources do not unveil the iconological qualities of the ambivalent yet ubiquitous objects mediating between clothing, pictures, furniture, and architecture. Faced with the silence of textual sources, we must use visual documents in the *longue durée* to explore the meanings of creating and experiencing interior and exterior textile spaces in seventeenth-century Rome.

In late-medieval and early modern Europe, the term *camera* or *chambre* reached beyond its original meaning—a space covered by a vault—to designate, in addition, a set of uniform fabrics that covered and visually replaced the walls of a room and often adorned its furniture, such as beds, benches, and stools. A stately palace's chamber was conceived to be experienced as a textile space. The historical features of interior space thus can be derived from the qualities attributed to ornamental wall hangings and figurative tapestries, such as tactile values and iconographic motifs, instead of being defined on the basis of modern notions of perspectival and architectural space. Display is a technology and regime of visibility for which textiles probably offer the most important medium. It has been noted that the word *display* can be derived from *unfold* (*displicare*).[2] By unfolding textiles, a space is constituted as a background or frame for persons, objects, or actions to be exposed to our attention.

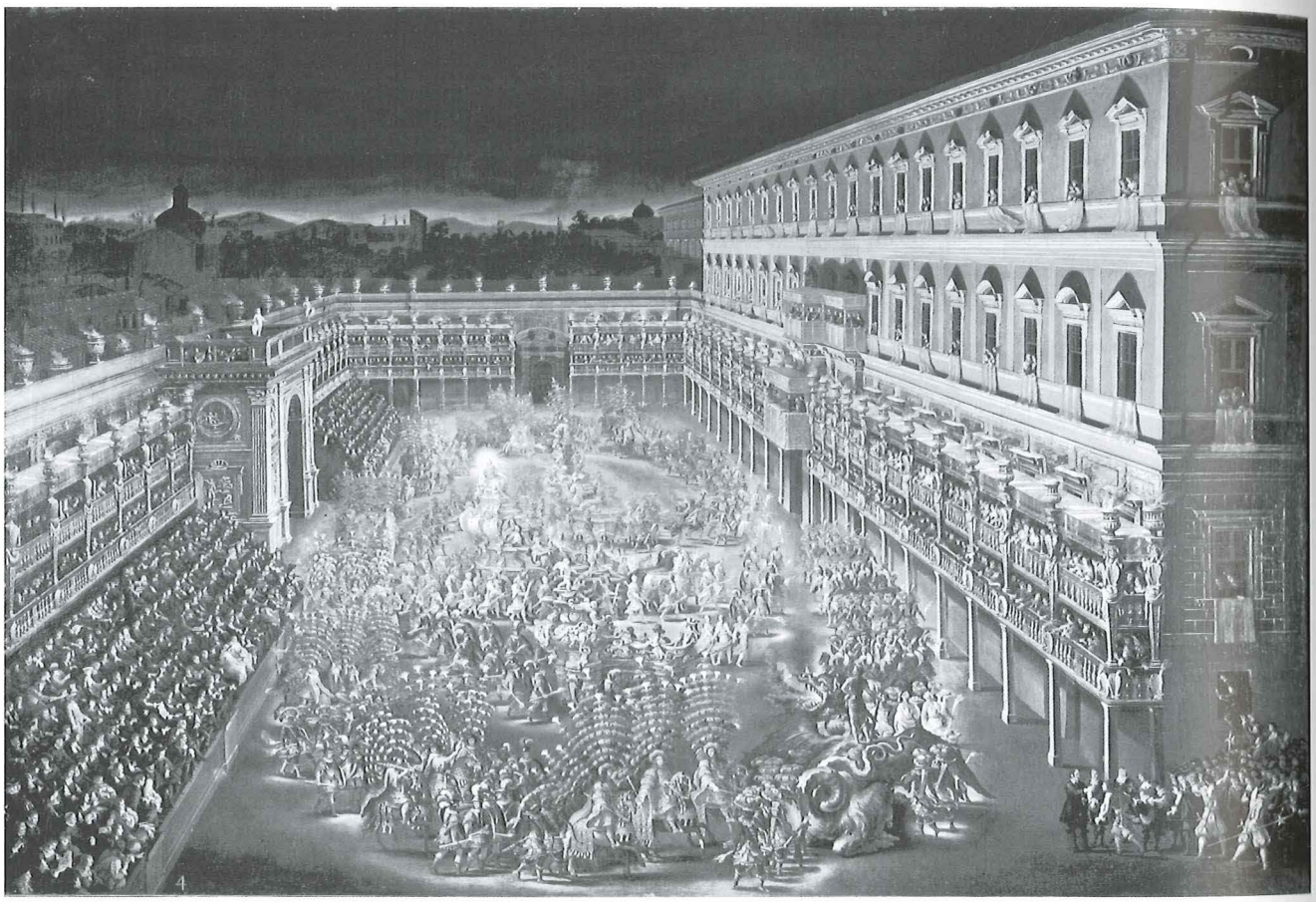
Much like the dynamic and topological choreography of onlookers and actors dressed in ceremonial and liturgical garb—an arrangement that forms a "living building" made of human bodies—textiles provide the most important means of symbolic and visual socio-spatial structuration.[3] The power of textiles lies in their flexibility with regard to changing spatial needs. Lavish hangings transform static architecture into a festive stage and subdivide space into hierarchical yet changeable compartments. Their material, color, and ornament unify series of rooms into one continuous enfilade.[4] They control visibility and accessibility.[5] They extend space from the interior to the

exterior, and vice versa.[6] The textile cubicle is a soft, habitable cavity that diminishes the noise, coldness, and hardness of its surroundings and approximates a tent installed within a preexisting architectural space. Medieval and early modern nobility seems as nomadic indoors as outdoors, and the aristocracy inhabited a series of multifunctional rooms, the traditional and extemporized functions of which were codified by colored uniforms. Following the late-medieval maxim *Ubi papa, ibi Roma* (Rome is where the pope is), it is not necessarily the architectural place that defines authority but rather the power of displaying and the very act of deploying aesthetic space.

In the *camera,* textiles wrap up and coat the architecture, walls, and furniture. They disguise and blur the room's spatial components with color, ornament, and material. But with the help of scaffolding and ropes—that is, with spatial engineering—textiles can delimit smaller, more exclusive spaces from larger, more common ones. They do so either as an integral or as a distinct part of the textile continuum; as another fold in that continuum or as a separate piece of garment. The baldachin and the four-poster bed, in particular, constitute a microcosm shielded by a *cielo* or *ciel* (a canopy; literally, a sky) of its own. Textile microarchitecture is a mise en abyme of textile space and an elemental model for premodern notions of space. This encapsulation of concave and convex forms can be seen in Pierre Paul Sevin's watercolor drawing documenting Clement IX's banquet for Christina of Sweden held at the Quirinal Palace in 1668 (plate 18).[7] Here, in a spacious room at the Quirinal Palace lined with red and gold damask, a podium covered with carpets and a canopy delimit a smaller ceremonial and sacred space. Christina, the former queen of Sweden and now a Catholic convert, is welcomed in the pope's political ambient, but she is also separated from him by the different height and shape of the tables, which are covered with a white linen cloth over red velvet. The baldachin's tapestries deploy their iconographic power by exhibiting the guest's new theological virtues of Faith, Justice, and Charity as a precondition for her invitation. They are sanctioned by God the Father in Heaven, whose image appears in the *cielo.* The Brussels tapestries themselves date from the pontificate of Clement VII (Clement IX's namesake pope), providing proof of the continuity of papal power and patronage and the Catholic Church's moral victory despite the Protestant Sack of Rome in 1527. Theatrical curtains mark the opposite doors through which the two parties entered and will leave the scene. Finally, next to the musicians and in a hidden window niche, Christina's ladies-in-waiting are allowed to peek through the slits of the damask bands that suggest a continuous wall.

Textiles as a means of display present themselves, attracting attention for their visual content and patterns. At the same time, they cover and hide or reveal and expose people, objects, and spaces. Unlike in paintings, in textiles, the picture and support, the form and material coalesce. This ambiguity adds to textiles' semantic and material flexibility. Textiles hide and mask the walls and their cavities; indeed, tapestries that turn corners deny architecture's solidity altogether. Yet textiles themselves can be obfuscated not only by persons in the room but also by furniture or candelabra and, most interestingly, by the paintings and mirrors that are directly attached to them.[8] The fabrics enliven things and rooms, dressing them like acting bodies; conversely, they expose and thus reify people like furniture and pictures, figuring in a hall of mirrors or on a Baroque stage set. As if to dispel a social *horror vacui* and obey a libido of accumulation, tapestries with life-size human figures would seem to multiply the crowd in the room and offered the room's living occupants the company of men and women of all sorts, times, and lands.[9] Figurative tapestries in such a context can be perceived as images supporting and enclosing other pictures and thus as a layer adding to the montage of an incoherent and discontinuous visual and narrative space. Since Leon Battista Alberti and early Netherlandish painting, Renaissance painting has been conventionally defined by the open window or the mirror's counterimage. In meaningful contrast, the opaque textile medium is a layer defined by material thickness instead of by illusionary depth.

Fig. 51. Filippo Lauri (Italian, 1623–94) and Filippo Gagliardi (Italian, d. 1659). *Festival at the Palazzo Barberini in Honor of Christina of Sweden, February 28, 1656,* 1656, oil on canvas, 230 × 340 cm (90½ × 133⅞ in.). Rome, Museo di Roma, MR 5698.



Tapestries often covered doors and sometimes windows with a continuous scene or landscape, thus negating basic functional and volumetric elements of architecture and transforming the four walls into screens that present continuous scenery.[10] Conversely, tapestries were folded or cut up and resewn as needed to comply with specific architectural settings and furniture.[11] Large tapestry borders and striped wall hangings might structure space architecturally, but this very same system of tectonics collapses whenever tapestries are bent, rolled, and bundled. The specific visual power of flexible woven images contradicts painting's perspectival paradigm, which is ultimately architectural. For this reason, Gian Lorenzo Bernini asserted that the depiction of architecture was not convenient to tapestry, which denies real and fictive architecture's consistency.[12] Wall hangings make intimacy public and public space intimate; they could be called an architectural dress or lining, a second or inner skin, especially in the case of embossed leather hangings (*corami*). Wall hangings complied with the decorum of function, fashion, and gender. Dismounting colorful wall hangings and hanging up black or violet ones would, like wearing clothes of those colors, communicate death and mourning. Church interiors and catafalques were enrobed in black fabrics, constituting dramatic denials of architectural space as worldly illusion.[13]

Unified wall hangings marked rooms as a continuous and hierarchical sequence of staged privacy, and they could be changed according to the occasion and the season (tapestries for the cold months; silk or leather wall hangings for the warm ones).[14] Within the apartment, the *sala dei palafrenieri,* containing a baldachin installed above a *credenza* displaying a rack of silver plates, was a room dedicated to social representation and display as such.[15] Wall hangings, which visually replace a weight-bearing element (the wall) with a heavy one (the hangings), create a tectonic ambivalence; upward-growing botanical ornaments can help counterbalance their gravity. The textile decoration's ambivalence between supporting wall and hanging screen, its metamorphic character, is the source of many of Bernini's textile experiments and, in particular, of the visual pun of the lifted drape he inserted in the Sala Ducale at the Vatican Palace in 1656/57 (plate 19). The mock curtain hides a supporting arch and opens the view onto the auratic apparition of the pope. As the angels miraculously reverse the hanging curtain—the fake textile wall—into buttressing stone, the artist shows his ability to handle and bend architecture like soft wax or fabric.

The Barberini, who founded a tapestry manufactory in 1627, offered a joust in honor of Christina of Sweden in 1656. The stage set created for that event illustrates the exterior use of interior textiles in courtly display (fig. 51):[16] Silk curtains and wall hangings in heraldic colors are affixed to the windows to decorate the facade and exteriorize the luxury of the palace's interior. Tapestries, some from the Barberini collections, others rented, run along the walls of the palace and the ephemeral theater. Red silk and gold fabrics create cubicles that separate and present the noblest spectators. Such textile observation boxes, bulging out of the palace interior and growing on its facade, acted as presentation cases for persons of the highest rank, for those privileged addressees of display. Such a viewing balcony, or *palco,* was erected for Christina of Sweden for her to enjoy the Roman Carnevale (see fig. 6 for Giovanni Battista Falda's view of the carnival parade).[17] Here, the palace is transformed back into its ideal microarchitectural model, the baldachin, which appropriates the public urban space by converting it into a semiprivate room. The power of transforming the interior into the exterior, the private into the public, and vice versa, is the fundamental contribution of textiles to princely display in premodern times (see fig. 51).

Plate 6. Mirror with sunflowers, Roman, ca. 1660–1700, carved and gilt wood. Rome, private collection.

Plate 7. Filippo Passarini (Italian, 1651–ca. 1700). Console table, 1682–83, gilt wood and marble, 104.5 × 181 × 95 cm (41⅛ × 71¼ × 37⅜ in.). Location unknown (formerly Rome, Palazzo Ruspoli).

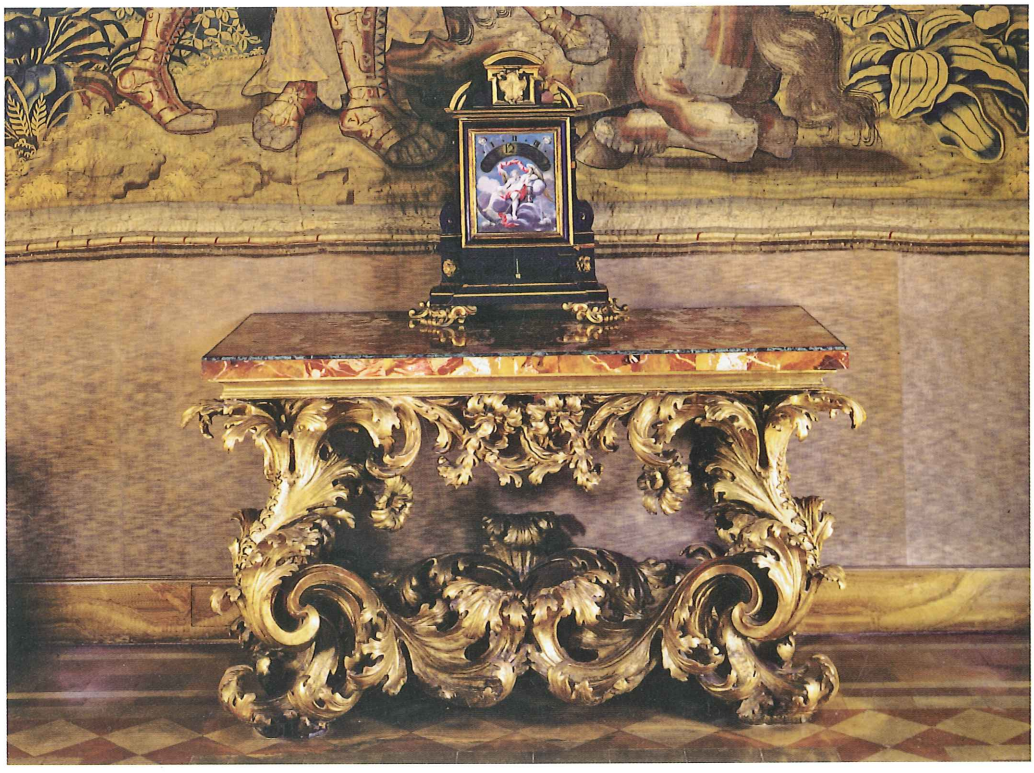
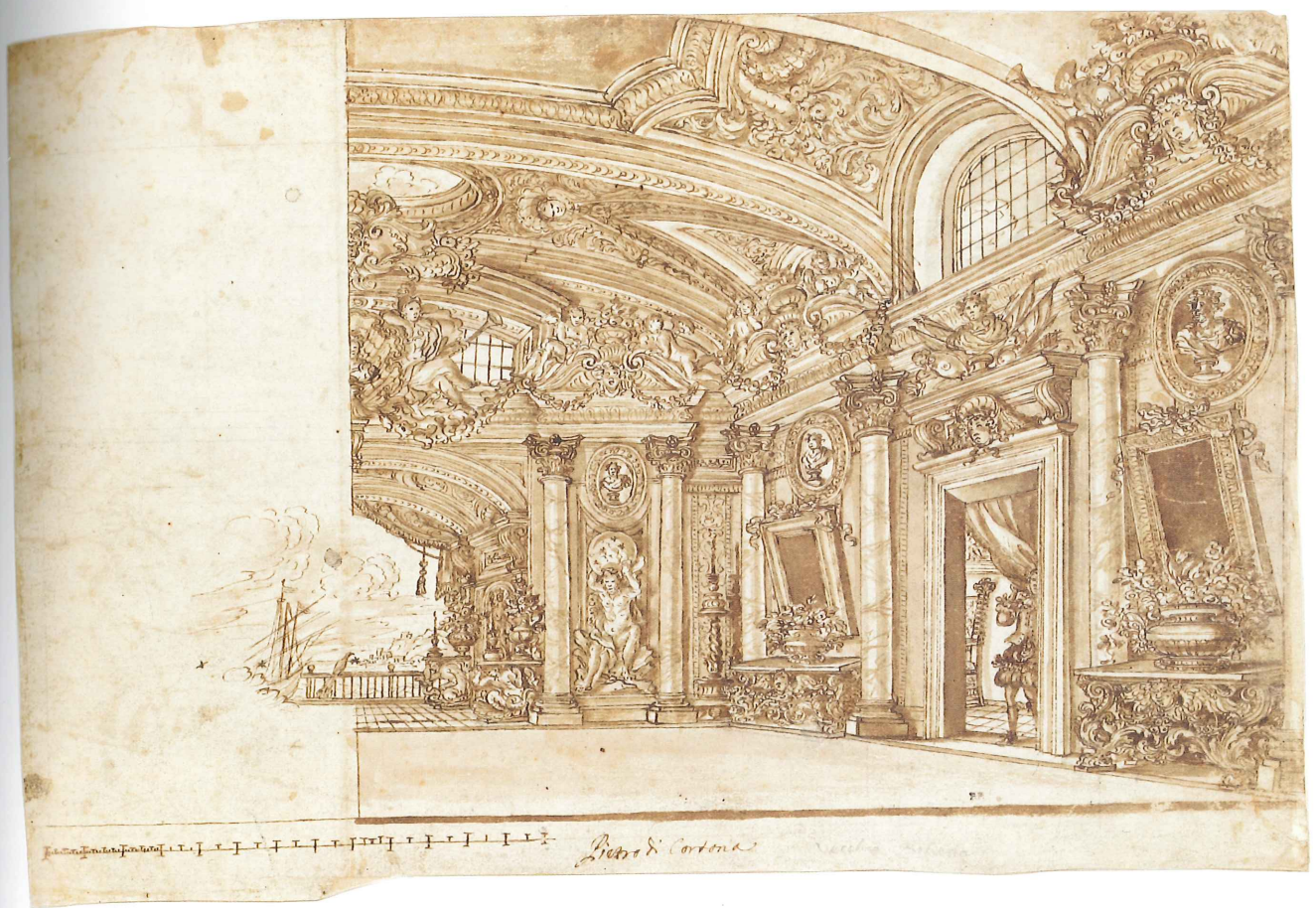


Plate 8. Giovanni Paolo Schor (Austrian, 1615–74). *Design for a Stage Set with a Palatial Interior,* 17th century, wash with brown ink, pen, and black chalk, 26.2 × 39.7 cm (10¼ × 15⅝ in.). Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 512 recto.



94–95 (Colonna and Altieri hermitage rooms), 251 (Colonna and Altieri hermitage beds). De' Sebastiani, *Viaggio curioso,* 18 (Colonna), 33 (Altieri); Rossini, *Il Mercurio errante,* 36, 46, attributes both hermitages to Schor but does not mention the beds; and Pinaroli, *L'antichità,* 62 (Colonna). Providing the latest known description of the Colonna hermitage in situ, PI I-77, item 2063 (Colonna, 1714–16, fols. 1457–58), records the furniture in the "Eremitario," including the rocky bed frame with a headboard of interlaced branches, as well as a kneeler, a small table, and four stools, all made of carved wood to look like rock formations; two additional stools that looked like tree trunks.

32. Tessin, *Travel Notes,* 326; and Tessin, *Traictè,* 251. John Raymond, *An Itinerary Contayning a Voyage Made Through Italy in the Year 1646–47* (London: printed for Humphrey Moseley, 1648), 73 (admiring; value 80,000 crowns); de' Sebastiani, *Viaggio curioso,* 48; Rossini, *Il Mercurio errante,* 92 (value 150,000 scudi); Pinaroli, *L'antichità,* 12–13 (describes the stones used; value 100,000 scudi); and Francesco Posterla, *Roma sacra e moderna* (Rome: for Francesco Gonzaga, 1707), 366.
33. Bertrand Jestaz, ed., *Le Voyage d'Italie de Robert de Cotte: Étude, édition, et catalogue des dessins* (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1966), 207.
34. A different "curious bed" with "Chinese-style" curtains stood in the second-floor apartment of Villa Borghese; Rossini, *Il Mercurio errante,* 85; and Pinaroli, *L'antichità di Roma* (Rome: Zenobj, 1713), 2:115.

Chapter 8: Textile Spaces, Interior and Exterior

The present contribution is part of a more-comprehensive research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the European Research Council. I would like to thank Julia Gelshorn (Universität Hamburg) and David Young Kim (University of Pennsylvania) for their valuable comments and Tabea Schindler (Universität Bern) for contributing visual material.

1. See Peter Thornton, *Seventeenth-Century Interior Decoration in England, France, and Holland* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1978); Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400–1600* (London: Weidenfeld, 1991); Peter Thornton, *Form and Decoration: Innovation in the Decorative Arts, 1470–1870* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998); Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces: Use and the Art of the Plan* (New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1990); Patricia Waddy, "The Roman Apartment from the Sixteenth to the Seventeenth Century," in Jean Guillaume, ed., *Architecture et vie sociale: L'organisation intérieure des grandes demeures à la fin du moyen âge et à la Renaissance* (Paris: Picard, 1994), 155–66; Wolfgang Brassat, *Tapisserien und Politik: Funktionen, Kontexte, und Rezeption eines repräsentativen Mediums* (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 1992); Fabienne Joubert, Amaury Lefébure, and Pascal-François Bertrand, *Histoire de la tapisserie: En Europe, du moyen âge à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995); Stefanie Walker and Frederick Hammond, eds., *Life and the Arts in the Baroque Palaces of Rome: Ambiente Barocco* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999); Anna Rapp Buri and Monica Stucky-Schürer, *Burgundische Tapisserien* (Munich: Hirmer, 2001); Thomas P. Campbell, ed., *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002); Thomas P. Campbell, ed., *Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007); Anna Jolly, ed., *Fürstliche Interieurs: Dekorationstextilien des 18 Jahrhunderts* (Riggisberg, Switz.: Abegg-Stiftung, 2005); Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis, ed., *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (London: V&A, 2006); Jeremy Aynsley, Charlotte Grant, and Harriet McKay, eds., *Imagined Interiors: Representing the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance* (London: V&A, 2006); and Laura Weigert, "Chambres d'amour: Tapestries of Love and the Texturing Space," *Oxford Art Journal* 31, no. 3 (2009): 317–36. Tristan Weddigen, ed., *Unfolding the Textile Medium in Early Modern Art and Literature* (Emsdetten, Ger.: Edition Imorde, 2011); and Tristan Weddigen, "Notes from the Field: Materiality," *The Art Bulletin* 95, no. 1 (2013): 34–37.
2. See Feigenbaum, chapter 1, this volume.
3. See, for example, Jean le Tavernier, *Philip the Good Attending Mass,* in Buri and Stucky-Schürer, *Burgundische Tapisserien,* 392, fig. 315.
4. See, for example, Casale Borghese decorated for Pope Innocent XII's visit in 1697, in Maurizio Fagiolo Dell'Arco, *La festa barocca* (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1997), 573.
5. See, for example, Jean Fouquet, *Trial of the Duke of Alençon,* 1458, in Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance,* 21, fig. 18.
6. See, for example, canonizations, Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome in Fagiolo Dell'Arco, *La festa barocca,* 427, 471.
7. Fagiolo Dell'Arco, *La festa barocca,* 465; and Campbell, *Tapestry in the Baroque,* 109, fig. 50. See, for example, Boucicaut Master, illumination in Pierre Salmon's *Questions,* ca. 1412, and the title-page miniature in Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies,* 1414, in Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance,* 13, fig. 12; and Joubert et al., *Histoire de la tapisserie,* 10.
8. See, for example, Abraham Bosse, *Marriage Contract at Fontainebleau,* 1645, in Campbell, *Tapestry in the Baroque,* 327, fig. 147; 328, fig. 148.
9. See, for example, Wolfgang Heimbach, *The Night Banquet,* 1640, in Campbell, *Tapestry in the Baroque,* 116, fig. 55.
10. See, for example, Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance,* 532, fig. 227; and Campbell, *Tapestry in the Baroque,* 108, fig. 47; 117, fig. 56; 118, fig. 58.
11. See, for example, Jan Steen, *The Van Goyen Family,* ca. 1650, in Campbell, *Tapestry in the Baroque,* 221, fig. 221.
12. Paul Fréart de Chantelou, *Journal de voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France,* ed. Milovan Stanić (Paris: Macula-L'Insulaire, 2001), 184.
13. See, for example, Bernini's catafalque for Paul V, Santa Maria Maggiore, 1622, in Fagiolo Dell'Arco, *La festa barocca,* 237, 522.
14. See, for example, Cesare Evitascandalo, *Il maestro di casa* (Viterbo, It.: Discepoli, 1620), 78; and Deborah Howard, "Seasonal Apartments in Renaissance Italy," *Artibus et historiae* 22, no. 43 (2001): 127–35.
15. See the section on baldachins in Walker, chapter 3, this volume.
16. See Fagiolo Dell'Arco, *La festa barocca,* 415; Marcello Fagiolo, ed., *La festa a Roma dal Rinascimento al 1870* (Turin: Allemandi, 1997), 15, fig. 11; 90–91, fig. 12; 191, fig. 12; Frederick Hammond, "The Creation of a Roman Festival: Barberini Celebrations for Christina of Sweden," in Walker and Hammond, *Ambiente Barocco,* 53–69; Anna Maria De Strobel, *Le arazzerie romane dal XVII al XIX secolo* (Rome: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani, 1989); James Harper, *The Barberini Tapestries of the Life of Pope Urban VIII: Program, Politics, and "Perfect History" for the Post-exile Era* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1999); James Harper, "Tapestry Production in Seventeenth-Century Rome: The Barberini Manufactory," in Campbell, *Tapestry in the Baroque,* 293–303; and Pascal-François Bertrand, *Les tapisseries des Barberini et la décoration d'intérieur dans la Rome baroque* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).
17. Walker and Hammond, *Ambiente Barocco,* 118–19, no. 5; and Fagiolo Dell'Arco, *La festa barocca,* 64, fig. a.

Chapter 9: Dressing the Palace

This essay was translated by A. Lawrence Jenkens. I wish to thank Patrizia Cavazzini for checking the translation. Unless otherwise noted, foreign-language quotations were translated by Gail Feigenbaum and Francesco Freddolini.

The title of this chapter is inspired by Filippo Baldinucci's description of the Accademia dei Percossi's display in Florence in the 1640s, in which the author uses the term dress *when describing the interior decoration*